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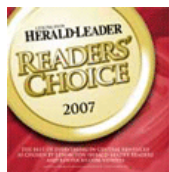
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Tent caterpillar population threatens horse farms

The Associated Press

LEXINGTON, KY. -- Officials at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture are warning horse farm owners to be wary of an usually high tent caterpillar population.

<http://www.kentucky.com>

The warning comes six years after the state lost nearly 30 percent of its foal crop to mare reproductive loss syndrome, which scientists attributed to the large number of tent caterpillars in the area.

Scientists said the mares contracted the syndrome by inadvertently digesting the caterpillars, whose hairs would cause tiny punctures in the digestive tract that let in bacteria that would compromise the foals.

So far there have been no reports of foals lost to the syndrome, though officials say the cool spring means the caterpillars are still a few weeks behind in hatching.

Still, the Kentucky Thoroughbred Farm Managers Club is taking no chances. The group sent out an e-mail last week urging members to protect their horses.

"I don't think it's as bad as '01 and '02, but it's also a little later in the year," said Barry Robinette, president of the club. "It's certainly a rise in what we've seen in the last few years. I think it's a concern, so right now is the time to treat them."

Robinette said farm owners could inject cherry trees and other caterpillar hosts with insecticide, though it can be costly.

Many farm owners removed black cherry trees from pastures and fence rows following the 2001 outbreak, in which hundreds of foals were born dead or dying and thousands of mares aborted in the early stages of their pregnancies. The deaths resulted in the breeding industry to take a \$335 million hit.

Information from: Lexington Herald-Leader, <http://www.kentucky.com>

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